1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

CHAPTER ONE

The Setting

1. THE SETTING

105 131 SHAMIRPET is a village situated at a distance of about twenty-five miles from the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad in the Deccan plateau of India. Culturally it lies in the region known as Telangana, which is itself a part of the wider culture-area of Andhra-desa. Telangana is a country of fertile fields and barren rocks; a land of temples, tanks and lakes. It is estimated that there are over twenty thousand lakes and tanks in this region, which covers an area of more than 42,000 square miles. Shamirpet is located by the side of one of these tanks and lies on the road that links the capital city of Hyderabad with Karimnagar, the headquarters of the northern district of that name.

133 134 137 132 The picturesque landscape of the village is truly characteristic of the Deccan plateau. The soil is in part black and in part red, and is suitable for the cultivation of rice, millet, castor and other oil-seeds, pulses and tobacco. An endless series of barren rocks formed of gneisses and granites dominates the land. Tall palmyra trees stand magnificently and imperiously against the often-clear sky, evergreen shrubs circle the rock formations and tamarind trees grow here and there near human habitation. In the countryside surrounding Shamirpet the average annual rainfall is about twenty-five inches. From Indian standards, the climate is moderate and knows no extremes either in winter or in summer. The days during the summer season are rather hot, the temperature often touching 112° F., but the evenings and nights are always cool and pleasant. In some winter nights the temperature drops to 137 45° F. There is little forest in the country immediately surrounding

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137 Shamirpet and the neighbouring cluster of villages. However, villagers are able to collect some fuel as well as small quantities of edible and marketable minor forest produce from the local
136 scrub jungle. In this type of landscape little game is to be expected. Tigers from the forests fifteen or twenty miles away are occasionally seen, but panthers, in search of stray goats, calves and dogs, are more frequent visitors to the village. Wild pigs are plentiful and always do very considerable damage to the crops. Spotted deer make an occasional appearance in the surrounding areas, while hares which abound in the shrubs are very often shot or hunted with dogs trained for this purpose. Wild ducks come seasonally to the large tank near the village, and green pigeons and partridges are among the other feathered game found in the vicinity of Shamirpet.

131 It has been pointed out that Shamirpet is only some twenty-five miles from Hyderabad and Secundrabad, which rank fourth among the cities of India in respect of population and size. It is only fifteen miles from the Bolarum cantonment and twelve miles
[494] from the military aerodrome of Hakimpet. A regular bus service plying between Hyderabad and Karimnagar touches Shamirpet, and there are about twelve buses running in both directions on this road every day. From this it should not be assumed, however, that Shamirpet is just a suburban extension of Hyderabad. Although it is in regular and constant touch with the capital, it is an independent village with an organization of its own.

621 No village in India can be singled out as being typical of the
631 country as a whole, but Shamirpet possesses most of the characteristics which are common to the rural communities in middle and peninsular India. As an independent socio-economic and ritual unit it enjoys partial self-sufficiency in several aspects of community life. In the wider organization of the rural community it possesses partial autonomy. Its component units are mostly the occupational castes which are integrated into the structure of the village. Finally, it has a semi-judicial village council composed of caste elders and other influential persons. This council administers justice in socio-religious cases involving breaches of the traditional norms of society. The village as a unit of social organization performs several significant functions which form an important agency of social control.

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They mostly hunt small game, and are adept in the use of traps, snares and dogs. At the time of these investigations there were six guns in the village; and occasionally their owners went out shooting. Similarly, fishing is done by very few people, mostly by some young Muslim men. They do not use fishing nets and traps, and practically the only method employed by them for catching the fish is that of using the rod, hook and bait. The large tank in the vicinity of the village could afford a good supply of fish, but the absence of the fishing caste in the village population leaves this possibility almost unexplored. Fishermen from the neighbouring villages, however, periodically come to the tank.

The surroundings of Shamirpet offer very few opportunities for the collection of wild food. Around the village there are not many fruit-bearing trees. Mango and *jamun* (rose apple, *Eugenia jambolana*) fruits are mostly eaten while they are still unripe by the village boys. Parties of children and young people periodically go to pick wild berries when they are in season. These are mostly eaten on the spot. When wild figs are ripe children collect and eat them. Another item of food eagerly sought by everyone is the *chikur*—tender tamarind leaves. These leaves are curried, as well as pickled and preserved. Honey is collected by some men of lower castes and inferior social status, whenever they can spot a comb. Medicinal herbs, roots, tubers and barks are collected according to need.

Utilization of forest resources is not open to everyone now. From the surrounding scrub jungle villagers can collect only a limited quantity of fuel, as this—as well as getting timber—is regulated by the Forest Department of the government, and permits can be obtained only by making scheduled payments.

Different kinds of coloured earth used in washing walls and decorating the interiors of homes, as well as the ordinary requirements for the construction of houses, can be freely collected by the people. The Vaddars can break and shape stones without having to pay for them.

6. NON-AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS

In an effort to explain the broad outlines of the economic organization of the community, the traditional occupations and functions of the different castes have already been described. With reference to the inter-relations between the agriculturists

6:Spate N-4 (no date)1954 AWI India
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and Tungabhadra valleys lie at 1000–1500 ft, and to the NW the watershed between the Bhima and the Godavari is a great swelling upland reaching 2400 ft in places. But the general aspect nearly everywhere is that of practically senile peneplains, intersected by broad, open, almost completely graded valleys, and littered with monadnocks which range from considerable hill-groups to innumerable fantastic tors which look like dumps of gigantic road-metal. Around Hyderabad City these form "a chaos of granitic boulders . . . piled up in bizarre heaps, as if giants had amused themselves with childish games"; in places these rocky belts form a wilderness wide enough to act as a marchland.[34] With the poor sandy red soils of the gneisses and granites, a variable rainfall of 25–35 ins., and May mean temperatures in the 90s, life is hard except in favoured basins, where soil-wash and tank irrigation give some prosperity. Bare hills, reddish-khaki plains with scattered thorny scrub, rivers merely ribbons of sand for half the year or more, tanks bunded into the little valleys, all combine to produce a landscape with a desolate and brooding charm. The contrast between Hyderabad Marathwara and Telangana is extremely striking, and is brought out by Figs. 130 and 131.

The Ceded Districts are if anything worse.[35] In Marathwara there is hardly any surface water in the hot weather, except in the bigger streams; in Sn Telangana even this exception hardly holds. The railway bridges are stoutly built to withstand the immense volume of monsoon water in rivers which are then half a mile or more wide; in the hot weather they traverse great flats with a yard or so of water in the middle, and the herds of cattle or goats crossing the bed are recognisable from afar by their great clouds of dust.

Except for the jungles of the N, the region presents a decided savannah aspect, poor savannah with widely spaced acacias. Most of the tors are absolutely naked, and their skirts (with much of the more or less level ground) carry only a thorny scrub, in which euphorbias are prominent, while in damper depressions there are scattered palms, toddy or the wild Indian date. The scrub is secondary, on ground long subject to the depredations of sheep and especially goats, or once cultivated.

Agriculture

Rainfall, by and large, is much the same in Telangana as in Maharashtra; if anything more favourable, since the region lies farther from the lee of the Ghats and more open to Bay of Bengal influences. But differences in terrain and soil are decisive. The area here considered is about 75,000 sq mls, of which the TSA is only about 43% (approximately 20,250,000 ac.).[36] Forest

[34] E. Reclus, *L'Inde* (1883), 506; *cf. Hyderabad Gaz.* (1909), 2.
[35] For some vivid remarks, see J. C. Molony, *A Book of South India* (1926), 166.
[36] Figures even more approximate than usual, as those of Hyderabad are internally suspect.

133 dicates deposition in shallow but not sheltered waters, and the general lie of the E coast may thus be of great antiquity. The change in strike between the Orissa Hills and the Cuddapahs is very closely followed by the coast.

● 137 The hills are wooded and the pattern of relief stands out clearly on forest 132 and population maps (Figs. 18, 30); but the forest is thin, rainfall being 323 only about 40 ins. and the rocks porous or fissured. The few inhabitants are mostly Chenchus, an aboriginal tribe living a semi-pastoral existence eked out by the collection of honey, bamboos, fuel for the railways, and other minor forest produce.

311 The valleys, however, though on the whole poor enough, have a fair 312 amount of cultivation, mostly jowar (25–30% TSA), other millets, groundnut (16–20%), with some irrigated paddy. The topography in the longitudinal valleys favours the construction of large tanks by bunding a transverse [496] tributary gorge. The main (GIP) Madras–Bombay railway strikes diagonally across the S of the region, and is one of the most interesting traverses 133 in India. The hill country is first entered in the Nagaris, which are the last 361 Cuddapah outliers; here Renigunta and Tirupati are little towns control- 311 ling at once the route up the Swarnamukhi, the crossings of the river, and the col to the N between the Palkondas and Velikondas. Beyond, in the Razampeta corridor, the contrast between cultivated floor and barren hills is exceedingly sharp. The generally arid aspect is mitigated by groves of [342] mangoes around the tanks; houses are stone- or mud-walled, and round beehive huts, striped vertically in white and rusty red, attest the Telugu country. After crossing the wide bed of the Cheyyeru, the line emerges at Cuddapah from grey and arid hills into a greyer plain, a vast ash-coloured expanse largely given over to dry cultivation. The region lies on the margin of the October–December rainfall area of the Madras littoral, and the rivers rise in the dry Mysore Maidan, not in the Wn Ghats as do Kistna and Tungabhadra; hence, even in August, the great streams—Penner itself, Cheyyeru, Papagni, Chitravati—may be spreads of quartzite boulders, shingle, or sand, several hundred yards wide with a line of water a yard across, or even not a drop; while only 90 miles to the N the Ghats-fed rivers are full, great ribbons of muddy water half a mile or more wide.

312 Through the Kunderu valley runs the ill-starred Kurnool Canal, constructed in 1860–76 by a private company which apparently failed to notice the difference in the régimes of Peninsular and extra-Peninsular rivers; the complete, but inefficient, canal had eventually to be taken over by the government in 1882 after two decades of mismanagement. The topographical layout is obviously encouraging, and it is now proposed to recast the whole project, with reservoirs on the Kistna and at Someswaram in the lowest of the Penner watergaps; the project, if carried out in full, would irrigate no less than 3 m. ac., mostly, however, in the coastal plain of Nellore.